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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT WEDNESDAY, January 10, 1940

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "WINTER CARE OF THE GARDEN." Information approved by the Bureau of Plant Industry, U.S.D.A.

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January is one month of the year when you might think gardeners could just sit back and take it easy--gardeners in the more northern States, at least. But the plant scientists say that even in January gardeners have plenty to do.

One important job is to protect trees and shrubs and flowering plants from winter injury. Snow, and ice, and wind, as well as alternate freezing and thawing can do a lot of damage to your property.

Trees and shrubs often suffer most when a hard freeze follows a winter rainstorm. The ice that coats all the world outdoors may look beautiful but may cause many broken trees and branches. Long fragile branches and slender tree trunks covered with ice break easily in a little wind. White birch and weeping willow are examples of trees that take such weather hard. You can't do much of anything to save these trees. Sometimes people try to crack the ice from the branches with a stick but you are likely to do more harm than if you leave the trees alone until the ice melts. But after a heavy soft snow you can help by knocking or shaking this heavy weight from your favorite trees and shrubs.

When the ground freezes deep, many plants suffer more from thirst than from cold. Plants that drop their leaves and take a rest in winter don't suffer so much from lack of moisture. But the evergreens do, especially the broad-leaved evergreens like laurel and rhododendron that need water all the year round. These plants can't draw moisture out of hard-frozen ground to supply their leaves. Yet the winter wind and sun are constantly drawing moisture away from the leaves, and may cause them to dry up and turn brown.

If you take a walk through the woods, you can see at first hand how nature protects the evergreens. You'll notice a heavy covering of leaves and mulch all over the ground. This covering is nature's insulation. It keeps the ground from deep freezing and protects the evergreen roots. It also helps hold moisture in the soil. Wise gardeners take a tip from nature and cover the ground under their evergreens with a heavy mulch of leaves.

If the soil around your evergreens is not yet frozen hard, you can still put a layer of leaves at least 6 or 8 inches deep around them. If the soil has already frozen, don't add leaves. Leaf insulation over frozen ground just helps keep it frozen.

Winter winds are also hard on evergreens and the more fragile garden plants because they dry these plants. Sometimes evergreens appear to be getting through the winter all right. Yet when the first warm spring weather arrives, they turn brown. They have been dried out by beating winds and sunshine. So wise gardeners consider the wind when they plant large-leafed evergreens or any delicate plant. They plant them out of the wind. Or they put up a windbreak every fall.

You can still put up a windbreak. Make it of burlap stretched between poles. It may not look very pretty, but it will help keep your ornamental trees and shrubs alive.

Gardeners often ask how to protect rose bushes in winter. Rose bushes suffer when water settles around their roots and freezes. Of course, the tender shoots and buds may also suffer from freezing.

A good way to protect the roots of a rose bush is to build a mound of soil around the base of the bush. Build the soil up in a cone-shape about 10 inches high. This mound throws off water so it won't collect and freeze around the roots. It also protects the small tender branches and the buds.

If you live in a very cold climate and have a climbing rose, take down the long climbers, lay them flat on the ground, and cover them with mulch.

The way to protect your perennials in winter differs from the way to protect evergreens in one important point. With perennials you wait until the ground freezes before you add the covering of leaves. The idea is to keep the ground around these plants frozen and protect them from alternate thaws and freezes. Snow is an excellent protection. Some gardeners wait to put leaves over their perennial bed until the bed has 2 or 3 inches of snow over it. Then they lay on spruce or fir or pine boughs and a thick layer of leaves.

One good way to put your Christmas tree to use after the holidays is to cut off the limbs and lay them over the garden.

By the way, don't pack down your garden cover, whether it is leaves or boughs or straw. The cover needs to be loose and somewhat open to allow the plants to get air.

Zero weather often injures buds and growing tissues of plants. You can't do much about that at this time of year. But you can consider one point as you take your winter walk around the garden. Plants like human beings and animals suffer most from the cold if they are poorly nourished or weak from disease. Healthy plants that have had plenty of the right food and all the water they needed during the growing season can weather the winter better than those that have been starved or suffered for moisture.

That's all the garden news for today.